

**Biodiversity Conservation & Economic Growth
(BCEG) Project**

FIRST ANNUAL REPORT

May 2000 – April 2001

Submitted by:

Peter Hetz
Team Leader and Chief of Party
ARD, Inc.

Bulgaria Biodiversity Conservation and Economic Growth Project

is a collaborative initiative between the

United States Agency for International Development

and the

Government of the Republic of Bulgaria

implemented by

Associates in Rural Development, Inc.

Project Number LAG-I-00-99-00013-00

Table of Contents

Acronyms	ii
Preface	iv
1. Introduction	1
1.1 Project Supervision	1
1.2 Bilateral Agreement	1
1.3 Project Coordination – Steering Committee	1
1.4 Project Counterparts	1
1.5 Annual Work Plan - Modification	2
1.6 Work Plan and Contract Results	2
2. Results Framework	3
3. Planned Activities	5
Result 1 Park Management Models Successfully Implemented	5
Result 2 Models for generating and capturing biodiversity conservation revenue are improved	16
Result 3 Greater Public Awareness and Participation is demonstrated in protected area management	23
4. Project Management and Administration	29
4.1 Project Coordination and Supervision	29
4.2 BCEG Project Management Unit, Sofia	29
4.3 Key Personnel	29
4.4 Home Office Liaison	30
4.5 PMU Office	30
4.6 National Technical Assistance	30
4.7 Purchase Orders	30
4.8 International Training and Workshop Events	31
4.9 International Travel	31
4.10 Networking and Partnerships	32
4.11 Special Events	32

Appendices:

Appendix 1	Guidelines for Public Information & Participation leading to Public Hearings for National Park Management Plans
------------	---

Acronyms

AED	Academy for Educational Development
AOP	Annual Operation Plan
ARD	Associates in Rural Development, Inc.
BCEG	Biodiversity Conservation and Economic Growth Project
BSBCP	Bulgarian-Swiss Biodiversity Conservation Program
BTU	Bulgarian Tourist Union
CBNP	Central Balkan National Park
CHM	Clearing House Mechanism
COM	Council of Ministers
CRP	Contract Results Package
CTO	Cognizant Technical Officer
EPA	Environmental Protection Act
EU	European Union
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
FY	Financial Year
GEF	Global Environment Facility (note the acronym “GEF” is also generically in Bulgaria for the USAID/GEF Biodiversity project)
GIS	Geographic Information System
GOB	Government of Bulgaria
GPS	Global Positioning Systems
HQ	Headquarters
IQC	Indefinite Quantities Contract
MBA	Master of Business Administration
MES	Ministry of Education and Science
MOAF	Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry
MOEW	Ministry of Environment and Waters
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
MP	Management Plan
NEPF	National Environmental Protection Fund
NGO	Non-Government Organization
NIS	National Institute of Statistics
NNPS	National Nature Protection Service (of MOEW)
NP	National Park

NTNR	Non-Timber Natural Resources
PA	Protected Area
PCT	Project Counterpart Team
PC3	Public Computer and Communications Center
PCV	Peace Corps Volunteer
PEPUP	Public Enterprise for Physical and Urban Planning
PMU	Project Management Unit
Q&A	Questions and Answers
REC	Regional Environmental Center
STTA	Short-Term Technical Assistance
TOR	Terms of Reference
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USDA	United States Department of Agriculture
WB	World Bank
WWF	World Wilderness Fund

Preface

The Biodiversity Conservation and Economic Growth (BCEG) Project is funded by the United States Agency for International Development, (USAID), as part of its strategic support to the Republic of Bulgaria. The Project is sponsored by USAID in conjunction with the Government of Bulgaria – the Ministry of Environment and Waters (MOEW). The Project is governed by a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the two governments, and its implementation covers the period: May 2000 – October 2002.

This Project is a logical evolution of earlier USAID assistance to biodiversity conservation in the country. It follows some 10 years of assessment, technical assistance and financing of Bulgaria's biodiversity conservation strategic development, new protected areas legislation, and new national park institutions. The Project is designed to capitalize on the achievements of the Bulgaria Global Environmental Facility (GEF) Biodiversity Project (implemented during the period June 1995-April 2000), and builds on lessons learned.

The BCEG Project addresses six specific contract themes known as tasks or “contract result packages”. The BCEG Project includes the finalization and implementation of two national park management plans, the development of a new management plan for Rila Monastery Nature Park. It assists in the development of financial mechanisms and strategies to ensure the solvency of national parks. The Project pilots economic growth activities with select target groups around two Bulgarian national parks. And it continues to build on the principles of strong public information and awareness as stepping stones for informed public engagement and promotion of biodiversity conservation and protected area management activities.

This Project is issued as a Task Order (Contract Number LAG-I-00-99-00013-00) under the USAID Global Biodiversity and Forestry Indefinite Quantities Contract (IQC); and is implemented on behalf of USAID by Associates in Rural Development, (ARD) Inc., of Burlington, Vermont, USA.

The Project is implemented through a Project Management Unit (PMU) based in Sofia, and includes a Team Leader, three Bulgarian technical specialists, and support staff.

Project activities are coordinated through two mechanisms –

- (a) Project Coordination Group – serves as a steering committee for Project planning and monitors implementation. This consists of the National Nature Protection Service of the MOEW, and national park directors, the PMU and USAID.
- (b) Project Counterpart Team – PMU staff working with MOEW/NNPS counterparts

The Project is largely implemented through the Directorates for Rila and Central Balkan National Parks. Additional technical assistance is provided by Bulgarian and international consultants, and is based on specific terms of reference.

1.0 Introduction

BCEG Project activities are guided by a life of project work plan, implemented through an annual work plan. Reports regarding progress are required quarterly, and annually. This annual report covers the period **May 2000 - April 2001**.

1.1 Project Supervision

USAID manages this contract through a project officer, or Cognizant Technical Officer (CTO) based in Washington D.C., Europe and Eurasia Bureau/EEST. The BCEG Project however, is one of the USAID Mission to Bulgaria's "Special Initiatives and Cross-cutting Programs". This unusual management structure is historical. Traditionally, the Project has also been supported and overseen by the Mission's Program Unit, in Sofia.

The USAID Mission to Bulgaria appointed an Environment and Natural Resources Specialist to its staff in March 2001. Among other program duties, the Specialist represents the Mission's interests to the Project, and is now a direct point of contact to the Mission's country program.

1.2 Bilateral Agreement

A Memorandum of Understanding is the formal tool governing the working agreement between the Governments of the United States of America and the Republic of Bulgaria. The MOU was signed between the Governments of the USA and Republic of Bulgaria, on November 30, 2000. The Memorandum reflects the respective commitment of each Government to the successful implementation of this Project.

An amendment to the MOU was requested in December of 2000, in order to reflect changes to a critical timetable in the agreement. The amendment was not signed during this reporting period.

1.3 Project Coordination – Steering Committee

The Project is guided and reviewed on a regular basis by a Project Coordination Group – steering committee. This group is comprised of the PMU Technical Team, the Directors of both National Parks supported by the Project, a representative of the National Nature Protection Service (NNPS), and a USAID representative.

1.4 Project Counterparts

As required in the MOU, a Project Counterpart Team (PCT), was assigned in December of 2000. The counterpart team addresses the specific assignment of nationally based representatives of the Ministry of Environment and Waters, National Nature Protection Service, to specific tasks of the Project. These team members ensure more regular contact, joint project development, and communication with the Ministry.

Conservation, Protected Areas, and Management Planing
Eco-Enterprise
Public Awareness
Counterpart Team Leader

Mihail Mihailov
Raina Hardalova
Katia Shavuleva
Hristo Bojinov

1.5 Annual Work Plan - Modification

During this reporting period, the annual Work plan was modified and approved to reflect the negotiated changes to some of the Project's timetables.

1.6 Work Plan and Contract Results

The Work Plan is developed in response to the Project contract and its tasks. Each task is accomplished through a set of sub-tasks. The PMU has organized these tasks and sub-tasks in logical clusters supporting a hierarchy of expected results. As a consequence, we report on six contract results packages – or distinct project themes. These include:

- | | |
|----------------------------------|---|
| <i>Contract Result Package 1</i> | Finalize Management Plans for Rila and Central Balkan National Parks, and deliver to the Council of Ministers |
| <i>Contract Result Package 2</i> | Effective Management and Priority Actions of Management Plans Supported |
| <i>Contract Result Package 3</i> | Park-related eco-enterprises demonstrated for ecotourism and natural, non-timber resources collection |
| <i>Contract Result Package 4</i> | Mechanism for National Park Financial Sustainability Established |
| <i>Contract Result Package 5</i> | Rila Monastery Nature Park Management Plan Prepared |
| <i>Contract Result Package 6</i> | Public Awareness and Promotion Campaigns Implemented |

Additional reporting themes are related to Project management and coordination, Networking and Partnerships, Special Project Issues, etc.

2.0 Results Framework

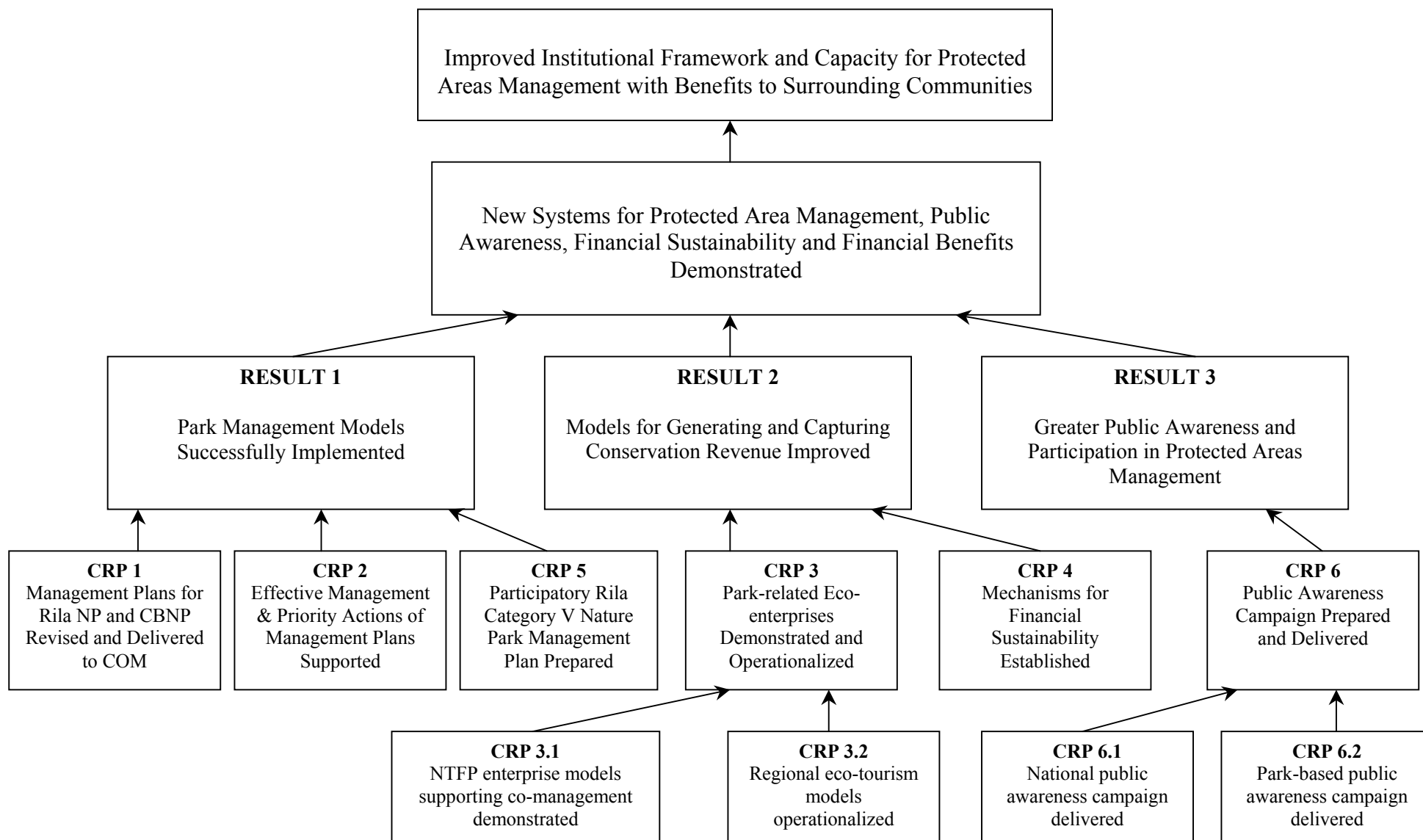
The aim of the Project is to contribute to the improved institutional framework and capacity for protected areas management in Bulgaria with benefits to communities surrounding key protected area sites.

A secondary objective is to demonstrate new systems for protected areas management, public awareness, financial sustainability and financial benefits. In order to achieve this hierarchy of objectives, the Project supports **three direct results**, or outcomes:

- Park management models are successfully implemented
- Models for generating and capturing biodiversity conservation revenue are improved; and,
- Greater public awareness and participation is demonstrated in protected areas management

Project reporting is guided by the six results packages. Our annual report uses the six results package to account a set of activities covered by the reporting period, and quantifies results/activities. A narrative also describes constraints to achievement of project targets.

The Project's results are illustrated below.

Figure 1 Results Framework

3.0 Planned Activities

Result 1 Park Management Models Successfully Implemented

General Protected area management models continue to be developed through five major areas of support – and each is related to activities and themes of this Project. The five areas include:

1. Support for development of an enabling environment (Legislative Framework);
2. Management Planning – an interactive process conducted by a multi-disciplinary team;
3. Management Plan implementation – Technical and financial support for implementation of protected area (Park) programs and projects that are identified and approved in the Management Plans;
4. Technical training and capacity building at Park level; and
5. Public awareness and information

Park management models for Bulgaria have many important indicators of success. For the purpose of reporting at the level of Strategic Objective for USAID-Bulgaria, we have selected the following indicators of successful park management model implementation:

Number of contemporary protected area management practices adapted and implemented by Bulgarian National Park management.

“contemporary management practices” are defined as a “a set of recognized international protected area management approaches that include: conservation biology, habitat conservation, management zoning, tourist management, visitor interpretation and education, conservation management in a regional and landscape context, revenue generation, and work with surrounding communities to provide education and economic benefits.”

“adapted and implemented” are defined as “provided for in general management plans, developed in sufficient detail to effectively budget for, allocate personnel, and implemented on a pilot basis or incorporated into an operational system for the national park(s)”.

We consider the following management categories an indication of success, and monitor these activities with National Parks accordingly:

- Natural resource management activities implemented
- Tourist management and infrastructure projects implemented
- Interpretation and education programs established for tourists
- Local partnerships developed and nurtured
- Park Administrative Systems functioning
- Revenue Generating Project/activities implemented; and
- Nature park management plans developed and approved.

Each one of these park management themes contains a number of representative projects/activities. For example, “Natural resources management activities implemented”, would include:

- establishment of an ecological monitoring program;
- fire management and mitigation plan
- medicinal plants management plan

In order to continue our support to the development of these successful models, we are engaged in the following tasks – expressed as **results packages** – sets of tasks and sub-tasks that contribute to successful implementation of park models.

This contract result (objective) is supported by three (3) contract results packages

CRP 1 Management Plans for Rila and Central Balkan National Parks revised and delivered to Council of Ministers for approval.

Indicators	Target	Actual
Number of management plans revised and submitted to CoM	2	2
Number of public hearings conducted in support of management plan approval	2	2

Management plans produced in final draft form, under the Bulgarian GEF Biodiversity Project have been revised and delivered to the Higher Expert Council of the MOEW during this reporting period. This process has been time-consuming and lengthy due to the pioneering nature of both plans relative to guiding legislation. These are the first protected area management plans in Bulgaria produced using new protected area legislation and regulations for management planning. As a consequence, many of the steps in the management plan review and approval process are without precedent. Many were developed and negotiated as the review process was completed. We believe that important precedents were established during this process, and that many of these affect other protected area management planning activities, as well as the interpretation of management planning regulations and protected area management policy.

The revision period consisted of a 12-month period, and is characterized by four phases:

Phase 1 - May 2000 – September 2000 – Management plan review meetings and analysis of content and negotiations on protected area zoning, regimes and norms, with the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences and the National Nature Protection Service of the MOEW.

Phase 2 – October – December 2000 - Development and interpretation of policy guidelines for national park management activities. Also development of 3-year implementation plan budgeting guidelines, and budgets.

Phase 3 – January – March 2001 - Preparation for formal public hearings for both management plans, and holding Public Hearings in Gabrovo and Blagoevgrad.

Phase 4 – April 2001 – Final drafting using the results of formal public hearings, and submission to the Higher Expert Council of the Ministry of Environment and Water.

As of May 2, 2001, we are aware that the Higher Expert Council will meet to review both management plans at the end of May, 2001 (31/05/01). Plans will be reviewed and their final determination made by the Council of Ministers, on June 28, 2001.

The National Nature Protection Service and National Park Management Plans

Both Management Plans were scrutinized by the National Nature Protection Service throughout this reporting period. At least 10, formal, structured meetings were held to review the content of both management plans over the course of this reporting period.

The evolution of stronger organizational roles within the MOEW is reflected in increasingly consistent points of contact within the Ministry of matters of technical substance. The appointment of Mihail Mihailov and Kaloyan Anev as counterparts to management planning review and approval has greatly expedited the process.

Still there are many concrete recommendations to the Protected Areas Act, and the regulation on management planning that arise from the review and approval process of these two plans. The BCEG Project expects to capture these and will share them more formally with the MOEW once the management plans are approved and implementation has started.

The absence of central government participation in the management planning process, as well as the absence of a central government planning capacity, is also seen to hinder the review and approval process.

Recommendation: We recommend that USAID-Bulgaria consider funding of a special workshop during calendar year 2002, to review and capture the increasingly important lessons being learned from protected area management planning in Bulgaria. By the end of 2001, there should be, in theory, as many as 13 protected area management plans readied using the management plan regulation and consultant-driven planning approach. Informal sharing between management planning consultants indicates that there are many different lessons being gathered regarding: (a) the process used for management planning; (b) engaging the public and stakeholders in the planning process; (c) plan formats; (d) the use of GIS; information access and management and the role of the MOEW/MOAF; (e) the review steps and procedures; (f) interpretation of management policies; etc.

These lessons should be captured and eventually reflected in both notes for protected areas biodiversity conservation and management within USAID/BIOFOR, in the region, and hopefully, reflected in amendments to the Protected Areas Act.

The National Park Directorates and National Park Management Plans

Since the Project strategy has been to engage both Park Directorates from the outset in the development of management plans, formal structured meetings continued with the core team of Directorate experts. 6 such meetings – three in each directorate were held for purposes of (a) developing protected area management policies and policy guidelines; (b) budgeting the first, three-year implementation plans; (c) revising management zones, and associated regimes and norms. This engagement has been essential to ownership of Management Plans by Directorates. In addition, Park Directorate staff proved an invaluable source of information and expertise in the formulation of management zones, regimes and norms related to natural resources conservation and tourism management.

We maintain that it is virtually impossible for management plans to be devised solely by a consultant(s) without participation and negotiations with the Park administration and management. This must occur far in advance of protected area managers receiving a final

draft plan. The absence of a formal park directorate role in the management planning process, and the absence of central funding for their participation, is considered a weakness in the present approach to protected area management plan development. While the BCEG Project was able to engage both Park directorates in the planning effort through the use of workshops, meetings, and travel subsidy, there was no recognition of the Park's participation by the MOEW, as an official duty in the management planning process.

Finally, we maintain that the participation of protected area management teams is essential to the eventual success of plan implementation. It is also important to the decentralization of responsibility and accountability for management actions. We believe the latter to be a cornerstone in successful, long-term protected area management.

Preparation for, and Public Hearings of, Management Plans

In the absence of any guidelines for public hearing preparation, (and with minimum guidance on how public hearings are to be conducted), the Project prepared Guidelines for Public Information & Participation leading to Public Hearings for National Park Management Plans. These are attached as Appendix 1. These are the first formal guidelines for public information and participation in relation to protected area management plan review. They were shared and critiqued by both National Park Directorates prior to implementation. A final version of the same was provided to NNPS for review and comment prior to their implementation as well.

Both national park management plans were addressed simultaneously in an exhausting and rigorous schedule. It is very unusual for an institution, let alone a contractor, to address more than one protected area management plan at a time. In addition, it is important to note that Park Directorates and their administrative personnel in park sections were active in a five-stage process preceding management plan public hearings. These five stages entail a month-long set of specific activities:

Stage 1 Orientation and preparation for the public hearing. A three-day workshop engaged all members of the Park Directorate and their section heads in a review of public information materials and activities – a total of 32 park staff were addressed.

Stage 2 Public announcements, launch meetings and press conference for each park and its management plan. Three press conferences were held, one for each National Park (12 representatives regional and central media for Rila National Park; 14 for Central Balkan National), and one preceding the open doors in Sofia (16 central media journalists attended).

Stage 3 Outreach and Open Doors – an intensive three-week period in which each Park section reaches out to key stakeholders with a vested interest in the management of the Park. In addition, each Park hosts visitors specifically for the purposes of answering questions and explaining the management plan's content. Each national park directorate in combination with their section offices, covered more than 5000 km of travel. Rila and Central Balkan National Park offices conducted more than 760 hours and 680 hours of open doors and outreach, respectively.

Stage 4 Focus Groups – two focus group discussions per park were conducted on themes of particular interest to local/regional stakeholders. These group discussions were hosted and facilitated by the contractor. Park Directorate representatives attended. The themes

of the two discussion groups were non-timber natural resource collection, and tourism development and management.

Focus Group	Subject	Number of Participants / Number of municipalities / villages represented
<i>Rila National Park</i>	Tourism	50 / 12
	Non-timber Natural Resources Collection	30 / 14
<i>Central Balkan National Park</i>	Tourism	40 / 12
	Non-timber Natural Resources Collection	22 / 10

Stage 5 Sofia Open Doors – an intensive period during which the management plans, the PMU, the management plan authors and the park directors are available to the Sofia public for questions, comments and answers on the Park management plans.

Number of attendees:	96
Number of registered comments:	77
Number of hours door were opened and staffed by at least 4 project staff:	40 hrs

The BCEG Project provided funds for all stages of the public review and scrutiny of both management plans.

Materials produced in support of public hearings

The following materials were produced by the BCEG Project in concert with the Park Directorates. These materials supported the public hearing process:

1. large-scale management zone maps (1: 50,000) to facilitate public access and discussion – 10 for each park.
2. Management Plan summaries – 200 copies for stakeholders around each Park
3. Q&A leaflets on the two themes of primary interest for each Park – non-timber natural resource collection and tourism management and development;
4. Copies of the management plan for every open door for each Park (15 for each park and 5 for NNPS);
5. Public hearing announcements and open door advertisement posters;

Public Hearings

Public hearings for both management plans were carefully coordinated with their hosts – the National Park Directorates. The BCEG Project funded both public hearings. Each Park hosted one, specific public event dedicated to: (a) an introduction to the management planning process, its format and its content; (b) written comments on the management plan; and (c) statements of support, critique, and commentary on the management plan;

The MOEW, Deputy Minister, Lukova chaired both meetings. The MOEW were responsible for guiding public discussion on matters pertaining to the interpretation of the Protected Areas Act and supporting legislation.

The PMU attended both meetings, supported by the respective management plan primary author for each Plan.

Each Public Hearing was professionally moderated. Written, oral, and video records were made of the proceedings.

Rila National Park Management Plan Public Hearing – March 28th, 2001

▪ Public Participants (excluding park staff, PMU, and many journalists)	122
▪ Registered Public Comments	21
▪ Registered Written Comments	18

Central Balkan National Park Management Plan Public Hearing – April 3rd, 2001

▪ Public Participants(excluding park staff, PMU, and many journalists)	105
▪ Registered Public Comments	42
▪ Registered Written Comments	31

Management Plan finalization An intensive period of management plan finalization (three weeks) followed public hearings. Each public statement from the public record must receive a response from the authors. Those that are considered and rejected must be authored and returned to the proposer with a rationale for why their suggestion or comment is not included in the revision of the management plan. Comments that are considered and accepted must be incorporated within the management plan. Finally a complete record of the public hearing must be submitted along with the Management Plans, as a final testimony to the public response.

Final Submission 3 copies of each final draft Management Plan were submitted to the MOEW, supported by:

1. Terms of Reference for both each Management Plan;
2. Schedule of events leading to the public hearing, including, announcements, registered lists of institutions officially notified of the management plans public hearing;
3. Copies of the mass media announcements;
4. Program of activities with journalists;
5. Open doors records from each national park territory;
6. Open doors record from Sofia;
7. Public record from the Public Hearing
8. Copies of all registered statements from the public hearing
9. Copies of those comments and recommendations that were considered and rejected;
10. Record of focus group meetings including participants, and subject matter;
11. A summary of the meetings and seminars that took place in preparation of the management plans for both parks;
12. All scientific reports, studies, and research funded by the contractor during the process of management plan development.

CRP 2 **Effective Management and Priority Actions of Management Plans Supported**

Indicators	Target	Actual
Number of annual operation plans (AOPs) guiding park management plan implementation*	4	2
Number of multi-year action plans guiding implementation of park management plans	2	2
Number of projects implemented per park management theme	10	0
Number of public awareness strategies prepared and implemented during two year period	2	2
Number of training courses conducted in support of protected area management:		
✓ Rangers	10	0
✓ Park technical staff	7	2

* life of project target

** gray area added to qualify the difference in operations planning. Each park produced a three year action plan as part of its 10-year management plan.

The Project provided support to two specific pieces of legislation that have both immediate and long-term impacts to protected areas, their immediate surroundings (buffer areas), and their long-term financing:

1. Draft Biodiversity Conservation Act
2. Draft Environment Protection Act

In addition, the Project provided technical assistance to two practical needs expressed from both Parks:

3. Finalization of the technical specifications and tender documents for tourism management and tourism infrastructure in Rila and Central Balkans National Parks
4. Preliminary needs assessment for further development and training in the use of GIS/GPS in park monitoring and research activities;

Draft Biodiversity Conservation Act

Urgent steps were taken to contribute to the development of the draft biodiversity conservation act during the September – November period. More than 80 person days of BCEG PMU time, as well as short-term, local consultant time (8 specialists), were dedicated to constructive commentary on the draft act. The urgency of this contribution was dictated by the proposed time frame for review and passage of the Act; In addition, contributions were inherently important for the long-term USAID investment in national biodiversity conservation and protected area programming efforts.

The effort culminated in more than 100 specific recommendations for the draft law. These were summarized, and provided to the MOEW. In addition, a complete revision of the law was provided to the MOEW in edit mode, thus facilitating the comparison between drafts of the MOEW and those of the Project.

Final text was prepared for inclusion in the draft *Biodiversity Conservation Act*, at the request of the Ministry of Environment and Waters. More than 70 specific recommendations were adopted by the Ministry and forwarded to the Parliamentary Commission for consideration. Importantly, these included: (1) changes to the national ecological network that allows areas around national parks to be considered part of this network (buffer zones); (2) clarification on the roles and responsibilities of national park directorates within a regional administrative and planning context; (3) important clarification of the purpose and role of the law relative to other strategic national tools, e.g. the biodiversity conservation strategy, action plan, and EU directives, etc; (4) all new text concerning the necessity to include biodiversity conservation within a strategic national working group that includes the private sector, as well as Bulgarian Academy of Sciences.

Finalization of these texts was discussed and agreed with NNPS/MOEW in November and December. Proposed revisions and new text were forwarded to the Parliamentary Commission for Environment and Waters in the middle of December. Unfortunately, despite the efforts of the Commission, they were unable to move the draft Act forward prior to dissolution of the Parliament in advance of June elections. We are now waiting for elections, and the formation of a new cabinet, national assembly, the appropriate parliamentary commission, and the timetable for review of the draft act. We expect that elements of the law may need to be revisited by the BCEG Project in the fall period of 2001, as the new National Assembly turns to outstanding legislative matters.

Draft Environment Protection Act

The BCEG Project was provided with a copy of the draft Environmental Protection Act, for review and comment, by the Parliamentary Commission for Environment Protection and Waters. The draft EPA represents the country's latest efforts to develop a framework law for all environmental legislation. It is also the framework law for government policy that affects environmental conservation and sustainable development.

This draft law replaces the outdated Environmental Protection Act of 1992, and aims at complying with EU directives. Compliance with EU directives within national legislation is seen as a step towards EU accession.

The BCEG Project translated the draft law into English, in December. We submitted a proposal for improvements to the draft legislation for Environment Protection to the Commission during the Law's first reading, on January 18, 2000.

Other events in the National Assembly, prior to June elections this year, mean that this Government will not be able to pass either law.

Legislative drafting and policy support is not specifically recognized in the terms of reference/task order for this Project. However, since new legislative initiatives have an immediate and direct impact on Project results, as well as on the future of protected areas in Bulgaria, it remains important to retain the flexibility to engage in matters of legislative development that affect project results. We expect that elements of both laws will continue to need attention, Project support and the further orientation of Parliamentarians later this calendar year.

Management Plan Implementation

Most Project assistance for the implementation of park management plans has been delayed by the review and approval process for both Parks' plans. There were, however, two important activities conducted in anticipation of approval of both management plans. These activities include:

Park Tourism Management and Tourism Infrastructure - Both the design and development of production drawings for tourism infrastructure in both Parks, and preparation of tender documents for regional procurement awards was completed this reporting period. Ironically, the construction funding approved by the NNPS/MOEW for calendar (and Bulgarian financial year) 2000, was withdrawn. The GoB contribution to implementation of these contracts is delayed now until FY 2001.

Full sets of design documents exist for specific tourist management infrastructure. This includes: Park entrance gates, entrance signs, lay-bys, control points, picnic sites, and information signage outside the national parks. These are not large construction projects, but rather the basic infrastructure to inform visitors of their arrival in the Parks. Additional signboards will orient and inform visitors at appropriate locations.

Trail marking and new trail development will be implemented by Park Directorates in conjunction with the Bulgarian Tourist Union. This written agreement demonstrates an important partnership between the MOEW and the BTU representatives from each Park, early in March 2001. The MOEW will supply some financing of trail development, the BTU labor and materials, and the Park Directorate, technical supervision and coordination.

In some cases, further design and implementation of tourist amenities (shelters, campsites, shelters, trails, etc., will be developed in conjunction with the Project's pilot ecotourism project areas. This is done in an effort to link the development of amenities with tourism opportunities, and the services and facilities of pilot communities. We believe this approach supports the development of a more complete package of ecotourism and marketing opportunities linked to each pilot area.

GIS Needs Assessment

The Project retains the technical services of a GIS consultant. Mr. Ivan Kountchev started a needs assessment of park-based GIS and GPS applications and skills development. The needs assessment is specifically related to the development of park-based GIS, its application in park management and monitoring, its role in supporting each park's ecological monitoring program, and the use of GPS units (procured under the GEF Biodiversity Project – six units were purchased). This needs assessment has resulted in four major areas of technical support and funding. Some of these have been funded as part of management plan preparation; others will be funded as part of management plan implementation.

GIS activities addressed and funded also supported management plan finalization. During this reporting period include, these activities include:

- Forest inventory data sets in formats that can be used by the National Institute of Statistics. This is a legal requirement. This information must be supplied by all forest owners – private or state, and supplied to the NIS on a biannual basis. We assisted parks with the development of the formats for supplying this information on a regular basis.

- Conversion of data supplied by the Ministry of Agriculture and Forests and the appropriate land commissions (that indicates the correct outer boundary definitions of all national parks), into a format that is compatible with the NNPS/National Park GIS platform – AutoCad LandMap.

The next annual work plan is expected to address:

- (1) training National Park staff in the use of GPS units, and GPS applications to field work during the summers of 2001 and 2002;
- (2) standardization of park information management, including formats and exchange of information between NNPS and the Directorates.

CRP 5 Rila Monastery Nature Park Management Plan Prepared

Indicators (life of project)	Target	Actual
Number of stakeholder workshops	5	0
Number of public awareness events held in support of management planning	3	0
Number of management plans prepared	1	0

Development of the Rila Monastery Nature Park Management Plan is a follow-on commitment of USAID and the MOEW to the long-term conservation and protection of this important area, removed from Rila National Park in March of 2000 – and re-categorized as a Nature Park in June of the same year. USAID is committed to support and finance development of this Plan as part of its follow-on investment in the conservation of the Rila Massif Ecosystem.

Development and approval of the Terms of Reference (TOR) for the Rila Monastery Nature Park Management Plan were completed during this reporting period. The Terms of Reference are required by law. They are the tool that guides the content and process of management planning.

Development of the TOR during this period was characterized by 4 stages.

Stage 1 Draft a terms of reference in compliance with the terms and conditions of the Project contract with USAID, by the middle of June 2000. This was accomplished with the international technical assistance of the Project's Institutional Development Specialist.

Stage 2 Review and approval of the draft TOR by USAID. This was completed prior to the middle of July, 2000.

Stage 3 Formation of a TOR working group made up of two representatives each of the Ministry of Environment and Waters, and the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry. This group was formed in July of 2000, with the assistance of the appropriate Deputy Ministers of both Ministries, and USAID/CTO and Program Assistant. This team held four meetings in order to review and refine the draft terms of reference according to the legal requirements of both Ministries, and new information arising from issues of land ownership in the protected area.

Stage 4 A revised TOR (in final draft form) was presented to the Ministry of Environment and Waters in February 2001. The final draft TOR was shared with the MOAF, for review and objections. The BCEG Project received final, approved Terms of Reference, from the MOEW, on March 28, 2001.

In order to initiate the planning process, the BCEG Project immediately formed the Core Planning Team for the Rila Monastery Nature Park Management Plan. They include four Bulgarian experts:

Dr. Petar Iankov – Ecologist and Team Coordinator
Ms. Sneshana Kostadinova – Sociologist and Socio-economics
Dr. Dimitar Peev – Botany and Conservation Biology
Mr. Ventsi Velichkov – Forester and Sustainable Forestry Management

This Core Planning Team is supervised by the Project's Senior Resident Adviser, and Team Leader, Peter Hetz. Dr. Petar Iankov is appointed as coordinator for the team. All members will remain with the planning effort throughout the management planning period. They will form the professional team that will draft the management plan, participate in all management planning stakeholder meetings, public meetings, and finalize the written draft prior to public hearings.

The Core Planning Team will be supervised and coordinated by the PMU.

The Core Planning Team held its first orientation and action-planning workshop in the Rila Nature Park, in March of 2001, for three days. One of these days was attended by the USAID Project Manager (CTO), and the USAID-Bulgaria's new Environment and Natural Resources Specialist.

Result 2 Models for generating and capturing biodiversity conservation revenue are improved

This result is supported by two contract results packages – **Eco-enterprise, and innovative financial mechanisms.**

The activities selected as part of **eco-enterprise** have been developed using contributions from both national park directorates. These pilot activities support models and are test cases within, and outside, national parks. Most were determined during management planning for both parks, and with the information collected from three years of socio-economic surveys. We believe that two eco-enterprise themes represent the best opportunity to:

- Maximize the partnerships between National Parks and their local, municipal constituencies;
- Address very real needs as expressed by local community members;
- Directly relate park management objectives that stress nature conservation **and** provide benefits to local communities;
- Generate direct income and support enterprise development in target communities selected with National Parks;
- Coordinate in-service staff development, technical specialization, and project results with the roles of Park Directorates.

The BCEG Project is supporting the development of pilot activities addressing **ecotourism, and non-timber natural resources collection.**

Both eco-enterprise activities contain elements that are expected to contribute to innovation in park revenue generation, and long-term financing, thereby contributing to innovative financial mechanisms. For example, matters related to non-timber natural resource collection licensing, and the use of concessions (specialized tourism services) could both contribute to park revenue generation.

The Project started to recruit a Bulgarian Enterprise Development Specialist for this set of pilot activities in September 2000. Almost immediately, the Project was engaged in major contributions to environmental legislation affecting the national protected area system. In addition, the Project was forced to recruit for a new biodiversity specialist with the resignation of Marieta Sakalian, who accepted a contract with FAO in Rome. Replacement of the biodiversity specialist was a priority, given the stage of management plan finalization for both Parks.

We successfully placed Kamelia Georgieva, former Environmental Education and Communication Specialist with the Project, into the vacancy for Eco-Enterprise Specialist. Activities in support of both pilot activities began in earnest in January of 2001.

There were a number of specific project-supported activities that have shaped this set of tasks.

Rayna Hardalova has been assigned as the NNPS senior staff member responsible for coordinating all aspects of the Project's assistance for the results package related to eco-enterprise. This appointment was completed in December, after the MOU signing.

The first activity undertaken was the development of criteria for pilot project area selection. This was successfully completed with National Park Directors and project assistance and guidance prior to the end of 2000.

The next was the selection of park section staff and national park directorate counter-part staff. The former would serve as local park liaison and representatives within pilot areas, and the latter would supervise the overall Park contribution to these pilot efforts. Both are important to the eventual institutionalization of these activities and approaches as components of successful park management models – as well as successful enterprise development models in Park buffer areas.

The BCEG Project has also identified and contracted two subject matter specialist – these act as intermittent technical advisors to the pilot areas. Both subject matter specialists (one for ecotourism, and one for non-timber natural resources) will provide advice and technical direction for the remaining life of the Project.

The Project has used the first four months of the new year (2001) to engage in important pilot group formation and organization. Each pilot effort draws heavily on local participation and expertise relative to each of new pilot sites. And each group is an important combination of local government, local private sector, park representatives and Project staff.

Finally, the Project is filling gaps in local information collection, through a series of appointed situation analyses. This is less rigorous for ecotourism, where significant information has been collected, and more important for the natural resource collection patterns and nature products enterprise.

CRP 3 Park-related eco-enterprises demonstrated for ecotourism and natural, non-timber resources collection

Indicators for NTNR (CRP 3.a)	Target	Actual
Number of NTNR groups formed	2	2
Number of areas managed by co-management agreement	2	0
Number of training events delivered	5	0
Number of park-based regional consultative workshops	2	2
Number of income-generating projects	2	0
Indicators for Eco-tourism (CRP 3.b)	Target	Actual
Number of eco-tourism forums developed	2	2
Number of eco-tourism strategies prepared	2	0
Number of eco-tourism projects demonstrated	2	0

In support of the start-up of these two pilot programs, two launch workshops were held in Bistritsa, outside of Sofia, in December 2000. Each workshop was conducted as a think-tank to review and assess the different option for both pilot area models. Successful outputs of this workshop include:

- Orientation of key park staff to these two new aspects of park management activities outside the park
- A review and confirmation of the criteria for pilot site selection

- A sharing of experiences between parks, Bulgarian specialists, and Government representatives who are recognized as experts in aspects of both eco-enterprise activities;
- Identification of the roles and responsibilities of the National Park Directorates in implementing the pilot eco-enterprise activities;
- The role and responsibility of the BCEG Project in the next steps for launching the pilot projects in both Parks.

3a. Non-timber Natural Resources (NTNR)

Development of both management plans pointed to the subsistence, historical and commercial dependence of Bulgarians on renewable natural resources, from National Parks and their watersheds. Rather than preventing access and harvesting of these resources, both national park management plans aim to maintain sustainable harvesting of these resources. Preference is given in this effort, to local communities and local enterprises. Unfortunately, some of these resources have been subject to poor regulation, in particular over the last 10 years. Both viable and endangered populations of plant resources can be considered under threat.

Bulgarian mountain natural resources are finding market in Europe, and farther afield. Large European companies, operating through Bulgarian companies and buyers, support a multi-million dollar annual harvesting of medicinal plants, aromatics, mushrooms and berries. Few benefits are realized by local communities, and almost no value is added to these natural products in-country.

In order to begin a program of sustainable harvesting of mountain natural resources, the BCEG Project has embarked on a pilot program of non-timber natural resources co-management. The program is made up of five phases:

Phase 1 - is aimed at forming a national-level working group to develop/refine the Pilot program strategy, and to develop the tools and methodology for focused information collection. Working group formation has already commenced, with participation from national and park levels – final composition of the team will be completed late in the spring of 2001.

Phase 2 – is devoted to information collection and analysis regarding pilot areas, communities, markets, technologies, and a “supply chain” analysis.

These two phases have already begun during the reporting period. Preliminary data collection suggests that blueberries could be selected as the natural resource that offers the highest chance for sustained management, co-management, and income generation.

Phase 3 - devoted to development of specific, local pilot area strategies – this includes: action plans, resource collection plans (inclusive of permitting), public information and training, monitoring, and enterprise assessment activities. We envision that these will be completed with the assistance of an international enterprise development consultant.

Phase 4 - implementation and monitoring of the action (harvest seasons 2001/2002).

Phase 5 – lessons learned and implications for organizational, policy/legislation, investment, and enterprise development issues (late summer/fall 2002)

In addition to the Bistritsa launch workshops in December 2000, the Project supported two focal groups discussions on this theme, during finalization of both Park management plans.

Two pilot areas have been identified – for Rila National Park, the pilot area covers the southern watershed of Rila mountain. The pilot area embraces the three park sections of Belovo, Yakorouda, and Razlog, For Central Balkan National Park, the pilot area embraces the largest park section – Klisura, on the southwest borders of the Park, in Karlovo Municipality.

Two field trips/working group sessions were held in each pilot area for the purposes of following up on the focus group discussion. The trips were used to explain the intent and major activities of the pilot project to mayors, local entrepreneurs, and park rangers/staff.

One workshop was held in Sofia in March to coordinate the design and use of survey questionnaires used for local situation analyses. Park staff conducting the situation analysis attended. The situation analysis is being conducted in April and May.

PMU staff Kamelia Georgieva is supervising this pilot activity. She is assisted by Chavdar Gusev, a Bulgarian botanist with significant experience and excellent familiarity with patterns and practices in NTNR collection from the national parks, particularly Central Balkan and Rila. Mr. Gusev is a member of the Project's working group, and intermittent technical advisor to the Project.

3.b Ecotourism Pilot sites

Since the start-up of the ecotourism component of the BCEG Project, the following activities, and outputs are noteworthy:

Focus Group Discussions

As part of the finalization and review of both Park Management Plans, the BCEG Project organized and hosted two focus group discussions on ecotourism in both Parks. Both focus group discussions were hosted by their respective national park directorates, and were located within the pilot areas for both pilot projects.

Formation of Local Ecotourism Initiative Groups

Each Park has formed a local, informal collection of interested parties. These groups are the cornerstone of a more engaging process that: (a) examines local opportunities and constraints; (b) identifies local projects in conjunction with national parks that add value to tourist services and facilities in the pilot sites; (c) identify business development and organizational needs; (d) develop marketing and promotion packages in support of pilot ecotourism activities.

Tourism Inventories and Catalogs

Tourism inventories of goods, services, facilities and features outside the national park were completed under the GEF Biodiversity Project. Some of these inventories have been turned into catalogs – both hard and soft copies – for use and promotion by each Park and its local

ecotourism initiative group partners. Two catalogs were completed for the two pilot areas supported by the BCEG Project. Catalogs for the Samokov area (Rila National Park) and Karlovo area (Central Balkan National Park) were completed during this reporting period. They serve as the basis for future ecotourism marketing packages and promotional materials.

National Institutional Links

Formal contacts were established by the BCEG Project with:

- The National Tourism Department, and the Deputy Minister of Economy, responsible for tourism. Two representatives attended the BCEG Ecotourism Workshop in December.
- The Bulgarian Association of Alternative Tourism (BAAT)
- The Bulgarian Association of Travel Agents (BATA)

Regional Associations

- Regional contacts with the Karlovo Tourist Association were established and strengthened with a meeting hosted by Central Balkan National Park Directorate. The meeting was facilitated by the BCEG Project. The Association has yet to register formally. Its formation has been supported by the Bulgarian Swiss Biodiversity Conservation Program.
- Pirin Tourism Forum – 8 years of British funding (PREST Project and British Know-How Funds) have resulted in a revived and renewed tourism forum focusing on the municipalities and townships surrounding Pirin National Park, and the south side of Rila National Park. Firm links have yet to be established with either of the national parks. Head offices are in Blagoevgrad.
- Stara Planina Association – Traditionally supported by the Swiss, this association of townships and municipalities on the north slopes of Central Balkan National Park, has renewed its efforts to link activities with the National Park Directorate. Their head offices are in Gabrovo.

PMU staff, Kamelia Georgieva, is also supervising this pilot activity. She is assisted by Nellie Georgieva, a Bulgarian sociologist with excellent experience in group formation, organization, action planning, and strategic development. Ms. Georgieva is a professional facilitator and a member of the Project's working group. She is an intermittent technical advisor to the Project.

CRP 4 Mechanism for National Park Financial Sustainability Established

Indicators	Target	Actual
Number of policy constraints addressed (<i>resulting in changes to income generation and long-term park financing</i>)	4	0
Number of innovative financing mechanisms developed and tested	2	0
Number of support workshops organized and facilitated	8	0
Number of mechanisms established	2	0

The Project continues to view the following financial mechanisms as the focus of our support for this CRP.

1. Private Sector sponsorship of park management activities/projects.
2. Development of park marketing and merchandising activities;
3. Development of a funding window within the National Environment Protection Fund to help assure dedicated annual funding, and greater transparency in fund allocation to national parks.
4. Formation and development of local NGO foundations in support of park management activities.
5. Improvement of existing Park revenue collection tools, e.g. permitting, the use of concessions, etc.

4.1 Private Sector Sponsorship – a report produced under the GEF Biodiversity Project identified opportunities, albeit limited, for commercial sponsorship of park management project and activities. These will be explored as both a part of CRP 2, and as part of CRP 6. In the case of the latter, we expect to successfully solicit commercial support for some of the national public awareness campaign efforts.

4.2 Park Promotion and marketing materials – provision has been made in the original Project budget for a small venture capital fund. We will investigate how to use the fund to support a loan/grant(s) to the private sector to produce promotion and marketing materials that have a direct financial benefit to national park revenue generation – either through a profit sharing scheme, or through a wholesale/retail arrangement with the Parks. There has been no progress made on this activity during the reporting period. It will be addressed during the first quarter of the next annual plan.

4.3 National Environmental Protection Fund – funding windows/dedicated budget allocation to national parks. Progress for this CRP is related to development of text for the new Environmental Protection Act. Specifically, financial mechanisms used in support of biodiversity conservation are largely the subject of this new legislation. The Project has proposed text that establishes sub-accounts/funding windows within the National Environment Protection Fund (NEPF). In association with this same mechanism, we have suggested text for improving fund management. Key to the long-term access and management of this fund for biodiversity conservation will be a system for greater accountability and transparency in the application and reporting on the NEPF. The draft Act awaits review by the new National Assembly in September, 2001.

4.4 Local Trust/Foundation Establishment – Given the restrictions placed on Parks to generate and retain income, Parks have become interested in the opportunities for local NGOs to raise funds in support of Park activities and management projects. Opportunities for this approach to work are limited in this Project due to time. However, Park staff were introduced to successful examples of such partnerships in the United States when visiting the US National Parks. “Friends of the Park” registered non-profit foundations/NGO’s for the purposes of enterprise development, with after-sales profits and donations dedicated to nature conservation activities in collaboration with the National Parks.

The applicability of this idea in Bulgaria remains to be tested. However there are two groups loosely associated with the management activities of both Central Balkan and Rila National Parks in Bulgaria – and both may offer some opportunity for investigating the benefits of such an approach. One is Children of the Earth in Blagoevgrad, and the other is a loose federation of people interested in the Central Balkan, called, “Friends of the Park”. The latter is loosely supported by the BSBCP through the Wilderness Fund.

4.5 Park Revenue Collection Tools – At present, National Parks only have one tool for actively generating park income – licensing of natural resource collection. Despite efforts, however, these funds are not retained by the Park, but are returned to Sofia, and added to the National Environment Protection Fund. There is little incentive for Parks to improve or increase their revenue collection. In addition, there are no proportional benefits received from the Fund. At present financial support to each Park from the Protection Fund bears no resemblance to the amount of money raised by that Park. Apart from Pirin, where a timber concession continues to provide substantial revenue, the amount each Park receives from the Fund, far exceeds their revenue.

The Project will look at ways of improving the use of licensing fees as a revenue generating tool. In addition, we must examine licensing as both an incentive for natural resources conservation and sustainable use, as well as increasing revenue for Parks. Way in which licenses are offered and used is also critical to demonstrating preferences for local entrepreneurs and enterprise development.

The Project will also examine the use of concessions. Concessions are presently not used as a tool for revenue generation and park management.

There has been only limited progress on this CRP to date. Most of our efforts have focused on the legislation (CRP 2), concessions (CRP2) and permitting system (CRP 3.a). Formation of a strategic task force to address financial mechanism has been problematic given other legislative priorities, delays in government budgeting, and the absence of several key players in this effort.

Result 3 Greater Public Awareness and Participation is demonstrated in protected area management

This result reflects an over-arching theme in the BCEG Project. Public information and awareness are key components of both national and park-focused efforts. For our purposes, we report on public awareness activities of a national scale, and activities on a park level.

CRP 6 Public Awareness and Promotion Campaigns Implemented

National PA campaign	Target	Actual
Number of public awareness strategies developed	1	.5***
Number of targeted public awareness events and materials		
✓ Targeted public awareness events	20	9*
✓ Public awareness material sets	5	4**
Support to CHM realized through technical assistance, needs assessment and mechanism design package (added to project indicators)	1	1

- * targeted public awareness events includes those events related to public hearings for management plans
- ** public awareness material sets includes those materials developed and used in support of public hearings for management plans.
- *** indicates that a national public awareness campaign was developed for Phase 1.

Our National Public Awareness campaign is characterized by two major phases:

Phase 1 – May 2000- April 2001 – generate increased public information on biodiversity conservation legislation, and the finalization of the Republic’s first national park management plans.

Phase 2 – May 2001 – September 2002, is designed to support Management Plan implementation after their passage by the Council of Ministers. It will have a particular emphasis on Bulgaria’s newly elected parliament after June 2001, the private sector, and Bulgaria’s role as a leader in European biodiversity conservation efforts

6.1 National level

Phase 1 is predominantly characterized by activities conducted in support of the finalization of management plans for Rila and Central Balkan National Parks, and pending environmental legislation on biodiversity conservation and environment protection. The campaign made use of all printed media and mass media produced as a result of the USAID-funded Bulgaria GEF Project.

Paramount among the public information materials that were used is the nation’s first popular book on biodiversity conservation – the Green Gold of Bulgaria. Extensive public awareness and promotion events were used to support the Book’s targeted distribution. Additional

materials included the publications: People and National Parks, and a set of national conservation education curriculum support materials.

A series of campaign events began in October of last year (2000), and culminated in its final activities in late April 2001. The campaign was developed and delivered in conjunction with the Ministry of Environment and Water's Press Officer.

Key target audiences were: the Bulgarian public reached by mass media, the National Assembly, and Bulgarian Diplomatic Missions, worldwide.

Steps in the Campaign's development and execution:

1. Development of public awareness campaign action plan – a series of focus group meetings and discussions were held with mass media representatives, national park staff, and NGOs. Focus group meetings were accompanied by an analytical review of data maintained in the Project's mass media archive. Newspaper, radio, and television audiences were reviewed and targeted for attention.
2. Formation of National Campaign Working Group – The group reviewed the results of focus group meetings and mass media archive analysis. They selected the dates and venues for launching the "Green Gold of Bulgaria" to regional, national, and international audiences.
3. Media and Materials - The Project produced mass-media packages, including invitations, press releases, videos and video clips, as well as posters and banners were produced, using a purchase order/
4. Targeting Opinion Makers - Chief Editors of the central media, reported, and editors working in support of nature conservation messages, were targeted with data, press releases, and invitations to the Green Gold launch. More than 100 names and contact information on mass media/opinion makers forms an important database for the BCEG Project.
5. Orienting Targeted Journalists - A "press café" was organized for key journalists with a predisposition to environmental messages – and who form part of the green network of mass media representatives. 15 key journalists were oriented to the methods, materials and objectives of the campaign.
6. Mass Media Coverage - Interviews, articles, radio and TV broadcasts were organized for key national park and Ministry staff. Project staff were also interviewed for select programs.
7. **Public Launch Event** - Major public event at the Earth and Man Museum was conducted on November 28th with the US Ambassador, Minister of Environment and Waters, USAID Mission Director, and other ambassadors and dignitaries in attendance.
8. **Second Public Event** - Mass media coverage of the signing of the MOU for this Project between the Government of the USA and Bulgaria on November 30th.

9. **Third Public Event** - Mass media coverage of the launching of the Green Gold publication, and its distribution to the National Assembly, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and National NGOs. December 18th - 20th, 2000.
10. **Fourth Public Event** –The national launching of the “Green Gold of Bulgaria” publication, and the set of **conservation education curriculum** – K-12 support materials to the Ministry of Education and Science (MES) was the final step of the first phase of the national campaign. The event took place in the Ministry of Environment and Waters on 19 April 2001.

6.2 *National Park level events*

The development of two park, regional public awareness campaign strategies. These used a workshop setting with staff participating from each of the Central Balkan and Rila National Parks. Development of Park-based public awareness campaign strategies included their own design of “Green Gold “ launchings. Development of these strategies was completed in October and November of 2000.

December/January 2001 also witnessed the launching of Project publications and messages at regional/Park level.

Central Balkan National Park

Launch campaign events were held in Gabrovo, Troyan, and Karlovo between December 14th and 15th in the Central Balkan National Park area.

Rila National Park

Similar launch campaign events were held for Rila National Park surroundings between January, 19 and 28th. Seven municipal launches accompanied their regional campaign effort.

Regional Campaign Characteristics - Representatives of all local institutions and public groups participated in the launches. Copies of the book were given personally to decision-makers from the municipalities around the park, teachers and journalists, through whom its messages will reach the entire community. In the preparation of the seven launches the Park Directorate received a significant support by the local authorities and the educational system. Halls and vehicles were provided as contributions in kind to the events. Local schools prepared verse, dancing and singing entertainment.

6.3 *Conservation Education and the Ministry of Education*

The national launching of the “Green Gold of Bulgaria” publication, and the set of conservation education curriculum support materials to the Ministry of Education and Science was the final step of the first phase of the national campaign. The event took place in the Ministry of Environment and Waters on 19 April 2001.

The aim of this final event was to publicize the cooperation between the Ministry of Environment and Waters, and the Ministry of Education and Science on matters related to conservation education curriculum development.

High level representatives of the Ministry of Education and Science were further oriented about the public information and conservation education products of the USAID-supported biodiversity conservation project. The event would be used to strengthen the cooperation between the MES and MoEW towards achieving better results in the expansion of the nature protection education and activities in the process of the educational reform in Bulgaria.

The public event joined experts working in the field of education, department directors and teachers from Sofia schools, with Ministry official. 55 participants attended public event. The Minister of Environment and Waters and the Minister of Education and Science were joined by the Director of General Education Directorate at MES, the Head of MES, Sofia Inspectorate; subject-matter experts; education method-developers; and the Director of the Information and Teachers Training Department. In addition, the directors and teachers from more than 20 Sofia schools, the public relations experts of the Rila and Central Balkan National Park directorates, and representatives of nature protection NGOs joined the event. 10 journalists from the central media covered the event. As a result 6 articles were published and 6 reports and interviews broadcast.

Minister Evdokia Maneva opened the event and symbolically handed copies of the publications to the Minister of Education and Science for distribution among schools.

The event was the first formal opportunity to acknowledge the efforts and activities of the team of curriculum development trainers - those who had developed the program and consulted the teachers from the two national parks during the development of the conservation education teaching materials.

6.4 *An Analysis of National Campaign results*

The first phase of the Project public awareness campaign were completed successfully with **more than 28 newspaper articles and over 47 TV appearances and radio broadcasts with a total duration of more than two and a half hours officially recorded.**

The preliminary evaluation of the success of the mass media campaign is based on:

One of the best campaign achievements is that 98% of the publications and broadcasts were accurate and positive. This is due to the amount of time spent familiarizing journalists with the two events and the quality of distributed materials. The mass media representatives were contacted frequently and consistently with appropriate information. Only two regional newspaper publications required clarification and intervention from the Project and the Directorate. And these were linked to the content of management plans and public hearings, rather than the national campaign messages.

“Message “ development was clear and positive. Messages were sent at the right time to the right people. The politicians and experts who were interviewed, were oriented, competent and gave very good interviews.

Media and Variety - A variety of speakers with different faces, voices and names appeared in the public space with the right messages, making the campaign persuasive and strong.

Supporting Media - The films from the -supported video library *101 Films about Biodiversity* were used. They provided strong and appropriate background to the interviews and reports and helped to popularize the beauty of the Bulgarian nature.

Media Archive - An analysis of the archive of Bulgarian publications on environmental topics kept at the Project's office (since 1995) served as a valuable tool for preparing the campaign. In addition, the archive helped to demonstrate that the number of **publications covering** the Green Gold launch and the MoU signing was **fifteen times greater than the number of all similar newspaper coverage for any weekly period over the last five years.**

Media Targeting - Particular attention was given to ensuring wide coverage by TV and Radio programs. There are two reasons: (1) they have much bigger audience than the printed media. Messages spread more quickly and more widely in through them. (2) Many media experts believe that high prices of daily newspapers discourage buyers and therefore they do not reach a broad spectrum of society. Interviews and reports on the National TV, and all the programs of the National radio are of largest significance to this campaign – they represent significant portion of the coverage, and reach the largest audience at the national level.

National campaign events were covered by almost all the major national newspaper, television stations, and radio stations. Further analysis and comment is provided under a separate report:

6.5 *Analysis of the Results at the Regional - Park Level*

The campaign for the presentation of *The Green Gold of Bulgaria* publication in the regions of Rila and Central Balkan National Parks was successfully completed.

Central Balkan National Park

More than 300 people participated in the events in Gabrovo, Karlovo and Troyan. There were representatives of the local authorities, NGOs, scientific and cultural institutes, educational system, and journalists from 13 regional/local media.

Over 10 radio and TV broadcasts and more than 15 newspaper publications were registered from the Central Balkan region.

Rila National Park

More than 700 people participated in the seven launch activities surrounding **Rila National Park**. Representatives of the local authorities participated in the event everywhere. In Blagoevgrad, these included the Deputy Regional Governor, the Deputy Mayor and the Chairman of the Municipal Council. More than 11 appearances on cable and regional TV channels, more than 13 radio broadcasts, and over 15 articles in the local press were registered.

6.6 *Clearing House Mechanism*

A major part of sustained public awareness and access to information on the environment, and particularly, biodiversity conservation, is inherent in two international conventions – The Convention on Biological Diversity, and the Åarhus Convention. Bulgaria is a signatory to both.

As part of its support for national public awareness, the Project sought links with other organizations and institutions that could complement national, long-term activities that support public awareness on biodiversity conservation. We succeeded in identifying and working with two international organizations with specific interests in supporting development of a Clearing House Mechanism for biodiversity conservation in the country – UNDP will support development of capacity at the MOEW/NNPS, in the establishment of a CHM. UNDP has allocated approximately 70,000 USD for country-driven project related to CHM, and they are funding a CHM capacity building study. The Regional Environment Center (REC) will similarly support a CHM-type effort, with a primary focus on a mechanism operated and managed by a Bulgarian NGO. REC is providing in excess of 24,000 Swiss Francs towards a workshop and implementation of the NGO-CHM strategy.

The BCEG Project funded a needs assessment of CHM biodiversity and biodiversity conservation information sources, information sharing, and information needs related to the preliminary establishment of a CHM in Bulgaria. In addition, we are translating the needs assessment report and the CHM User's Guide as primary tools for the country's first workshop on establishing a CHM. The Workshop will be hosted by REC in May, 2001. Participants from both regional and national organizations and institutions will attend.

We believe this tripartite effort represents effective synergies between organizations. Our ability to coordinate this effort, and "leverage" funds was first realized in a CHM concept paper that was the basis for defining and sharing tasks between projects and donor organizations. The concept paper served as the vehicle for negotiating different roles and responsibilities in development of national CHMs. The realization of its second stage – a workshop to discuss the results of the needs assessment – was managed by a steering committee consisting of government, non-government, and project representatives, including BCEG's project representative. We expect that UNDP and REC will use results of the workshop to focus their respective technical assistance and financial inputs to further development of a role for NGOs and a CHM.

***Svetlana Aladjem** was appointed to the PMU as the Project's environmental education and communication specialist, as of January 2001.*

***Katia Shavuleva** is appointed by the MOEW as the counterpart team member responsible for coordination with the Project's national, public awareness campaigns. In addition, she will coordinate national park, public awareness strategies and their implementation and BCEG Project support, with the programs and functions of the MOEW.*

4.0 Project Management and Administration

4.1 Project Coordination and Supervision

The following project coordination and inter-governmental events characterize this reporting period:

1. **November 30, 2000.** The BCEG Project Memorandum of Understanding was signed in an official ceremony hosted by the MOEW. The MOU was signed by the U.S. Ambassador, Richard Miles, Deputy Prime Minister, P Zhotov, Mission Director, D. McFarland, and Minister Maneva. The event generated significant national mass media coverage.
2. **April 10, 2000.** USAID-MOEW meeting between D. McFarland and E. Maneva on matters pertaining to the MOU, its amendment, and regular opportunities for meeting.
3. **October and November, 2000** Project orientation field trips to Central Balkan National Park and Rila National Park, for New Mission Director – Debra McFarland.
4. Project Steering Committee (***Project Coordination Group***) meetings to review, revise and approve life of project work plan and/or annual plans:
June 28, 2000
December 8, 2000
April 13, 2001
5. **December 2000.** Appointment of Project Counterpart Team - MOEW/NNPS appoints project counterparts. (see contract results for details)

4.2 BCEG Project Management Unit, Sofia

- | | |
|-------------------------|--|
| 1. Kamelia Georgieva – | Eco-enterprise specialist |
| 2. Dimitrina Boteva – | Biodiversity Specialist |
| 3. Svetlana Aladjem | Environmental Education and Communication Specialist |
| 4. Vessela Gavrailova - | Office Manager and Program Assistant |
| 5. Maria Yourukova - | Financial Manager and Computer Network |
| 6. Krassimir Kostov – | Logistics and Procurement |
| 7. Peter Hetz – | Senior Resident Advisor and Team Leader |

4.3 Key Personnel

Departure of Biodiversity Specialist, *Marieta Sakalian*, for a new assignment with FAO, in Rome. October 2000.

Appointment of a new Biodiversity Specialist – *Dimitrina Boteva*, November 2000.

Reassignment of *Kamelia Georgieva* to the position of Eco-enterprise specialist was approved by the USAID-Bulgaria Mission and BCEG CTO in January of 2001.

Svetlana Aladjem was appointed to the PMU technical staff as Environmental Education and Communications Specialist, January of 2001.

Dr. Scott McCormick, Institutional Development Specialist provided 15 days of technical support at the outset of the Project – May/June 2000. His assignment helped with development of the first annual work plan, and draft TOR for the Rila Monastery Nature Park Management Plan. Dr. McCormick was reassigned to a Chief of Party position for the USAID/CWIP Project in Jamaica. No candidate has replaced him as yet.

Daphne Hewitt, ARD support staff, and home office project manager, completed her assignment on the Project, in June of 2000. Daphne has since taken a position with Smartwood, and works for international programs in forest certification. No additional support staff are envisioned as part of this Task Order.

4.4 Home Office Liaison

Dr. Steve Dennison supports the Project as Senior Technical Advisor in ARD's home office. *Peter LaRosa*, serves as ARD Home Office, Project Manager.

Both staff provide technical, administrative and communication backstopping to the Project.

4.5 PMU Office

The Project office in Sofia was changed in August of 2000.
A new electronic mail domain for the Project was registered in Bulgaria, in January of 2001.

4.6 National Technical Assistance

726 days of short term technical assistance time have been contracted during this reporting period. Much of the STTA time extends into the 2002 calendar period.

4.7 Purchase Orders

12 purchase orders were issued during this reporting period.

Four (4) address GIS, mapping and database work related to new information on park boundaries, forestry data, and conversion of data in formats incompatible with the NNPS/Park GIS. All were issued at the specific request of the MOEW and National Parks. All were important to finalization of park management plans.

Two (2) purchase orders address preparation of designs and tender documents for tourist infrastructure in Central Balkan and Rila National Parks.

One (1) purchase order was issued in favor of the production and printing of ecotourism catalogs for the Project's two pilot ecotourism sites.

Two (2) purchase orders were issued in favor of national public awareness campaign efforts addressing Phase 1 of the National PA strategy, one for national level activities, and the other for park-level, regional activities.

Two (2) purchase orders were issued in favor of management plan public hearings. -One for materials production, and the other for design, moderation and A/V recording of public hearing events.

One (1) purchase order was issued in favor of the needs assessment for the Bulgarian Clearing House Mechanism.

4.8 International Training and Workshop Events

A USAID TRANSIT (Societies in Transition) Training grant was awarded to up to 12 Bulgarians who will travel on a study tour to the United States – Washington D.C. and Tennessee, in the fall of 2001. Participants will be selected from the Project's pilot ecotourism model.

Two international training and workshop events were supported by the Project:

1. *Participation in a course on Business and Ecology organized by the Central European University in Budapest, July 10-21, 2000*

The BCEG Project sponsored, Ganya Ilieva Hristova – Junior Expert at Strategies, Affiliated Programs and Projects Department, of the Ministry of Environment and Waters. The Project expects to work with Ms. Hristova on BCEG Project matters related to financial mechanisms and protected area sustainability.

2. *Implication of Land restitution Programs on Achieving WB/WWF Alliance Targets in Eastern Europe and Central Asia Region. Brasov, Romania. November 9-10, 2000.*

The Project sponsored two technical experts from the MOEW, – Mr. Mihail Mihailov, Senior expert with the NNPS, and Mr Lachezar Ivanov, Rila National Park Directorate Forestry Expert. Both experts are dealing with land and forest restitution issues as part of their respective efforts in protected areas and biodiversity conservation.

4.9 International Travel

(December 1- 4, 2000) The PMU and Project CTO traveled to Macedonia at the invitation of the Public Enterprise for Physical and Urban Planning (PEPUP), Macedonia. Three Bulgarian PMU staff, the Project's team leader, and CTO were hosted by this planning arm of the Ministry of Environment, Government of Macedonia. The group visited three Category V protected areas, and one proposed new protected area site in the country, escorted by two full-time PEPUP staff. The trip was a follow-up to the PMU hosted Sofia, event in October meeting with PEPUP, where PMU staff provided an orientation to the protected area management planning process. A debriefing meeting was held for USAID-Macedonia, and USAID-Bulgaria.

4.10 Networking and Partnerships

USAID Country Program – a series of orientation and introduction meetings were held with USAID SO partners during this reporting period. Efforts were made to alert USAID supported contractors and partners to the BCEG Project, its goals and activities. The most likely potential partners in future BCEG activities remain FLAG, CRS – Micro-credit, and Dem Net. The scale of investments of the Bulgaria American Enterprise Fund remain largely inappropriate to the small scale activities of the eco-enterprise pilot projects.

BSBCP - Swiss Program – The Project continues to meet regularly on matters common to the two projects. More specifically, we have coordinated on matters related to:

- BSBCP follow-on support, project design, and funding for Central Balkan National Park;
- Use of the BCEG Project funded converter for data from the Ministry of Agriculture and Forests to the MOEW.
- Management plan finalization for the Central Balkan National Park;
- Development of ecotourism pilot sites in the Central Balkan National Park regions;
- Development of terms of reference for management plans related to Strandja and Pirin protected areas;
- GIS development

UNDP - Coordination and parallel financing continue with the UNDP related to common activities for:

- Clearing House Mechanism
- Financial mechanisms

PC-3 Tele-center Project - The Project and USAID Program Assistants coordinated with the AED/USAID Public Computer and Communications Center (PC3) Project to attempt project synergy within Apriltsi and Samokov municipalities for purposes of private-public enterprise development and internet access and use, and to link these to national park activities. Both applications were apparently unsuccessful, despite the efforts of Peace Corps Volunteers to develop proposals.

Peace Corps – Four PCVs remain assigned to National Parks – three in Central Balkan and one in Samokov. They all report directly to national park staff.

National and International Level NGO coordination – Project links with Bulgarian conservation NGOs and WWF regional and national offices remains consistent.

4.11 Special Events

- USAID/USDA Forest Service Team - Wildland Fire Management Technical Assistance, January, 2001
- The BCEG Project provided advice and technical information concerning the wildland fire season of summer 2000, and its effects on the Rila and Central Balkan National Parks.
- The George Washington University will provide 12 MBA and Tourism Management masters students for a practicum on ecotourism model development in June of 2001. Two weeks will be dedicated to developing destination market organizations, product design, and training.

APPENDICES

*ARD-Bulgaria
Biodiversity Conservation &
Economic Growth
Project*

*Sponsored by
USAID & Government of Bulgaria*

**Guidelines
for
Public Information & Participation
leading to Public Hearing
for
National Park Management Plans**

Purpose

These guidelines are meant to steer a set of activities carried out in support of public information, scrutiny and participation leading to the approval of 10 year management plans for two, national parks in Bulgaria – Rila and Central Balkan National Parks.

These activities are suggested in addition to any public involvement secured as part of the development of the management plans. These guidelines provide a set of discrete opportunities for the Bulgarian public to review and comment on plans that will serve as tools for guiding national park management actions (exclusive state property) on behalf of the public, for a decade.

These guidelines provide a set of responsibilities and activities to be undertaken by the management planning contractors, the national park directorates and their regional park sections, as well as representatives of the Ministry of Environment and Waters/National Nature Protection Service, at national level.

Context

These guidelines are developed in response to the legal requirement for public hearings for elaboration and adoption of management plans established in the Protected Areas Act of 1998. These guidelines further interpret both the Rules on the Organization and Activities of the National Park Directorates, as well as the Regulation on Protected Area Management Planning.

The legal requirements for the role of the Directorates in elaboration of the management plan, and the procedure for public hearings, is explicit in the following excerpts from regulations governing the Protected Areas Act:

Rules on the Organization and the Activities of the National Park Directorates approved by the Minister of Environment and Waters.

Article 4. The Directorates shall:

1. Participate in the elaboration of the management plans (MP), and development of technical plans and projects by:
 - >drafting and depositing to the MOEW proposals for financing of plans and projects;
 - >commissioning the elaboration of technical projects for maintenance and restorative activities provided for in the MP and in the development plans;
 - >providing the available information required for the elaboration of the plans and projects;
 - >preparing statements on the plans and projects and participating in the process of their adoption.

Decree No. 7 of February 8, 2000, Council of Ministers of the Republic of Bulgaria, Regulation on Protected Area Management Planning.

Article 12. (1) Subject to mandatory public hearing shall be projects and plans for the management of national and nature parks and of maintained reserves.

Article 13. The public hearings under Article 12, paragraphs 1 and 2 shall be organized by the Contractors who shall:

1. Make announcements in one central newspaper and in local mass media, at least 20 days in advance, of the date, the time, the location and the subject of the public hearing as well as the location where the draft is available for those interested;
2. Place announcements with the data under paragraph 1 in prominent places in the respective municipalities in the same period;
3. Notify in writing the interested central authorities, scientific and academic institutions of the circumstances under paragraph 1 in the same period.

Article 14. (1) The contractors shall:

1. Present to the public hearing the draft management plans and shall keep minutes of the opinions, comments and recommendations;
2. Record in the draft the expedient comments and recommendations;
3. Draw up a document informing about motivations concerning comments and recommendations not accounted for, and shall notify the relevant persons thereof within a month after the public hearing;
4. Attach to the draft the minutes of the public hearing and the information about the comments not accounted for;
5. Send copies of the minutes and of the information document to the Ministry of Environment and Waters, within one month of the public hearing.

N.B. The persons under Article 14, paragraph 1, item 3 may make a written objection to the Minister of Environment and Waters who shall, within one month, make a final pronouncement regarding the expediency of the comments not accounted for and shall notify thereof the relevant persons and the customer, and the contractor, respectively. The contractor shall take into consideration the opinion of the Ministry of Environment and Waters.

Although both Rila and Central Balkan National Parks have existed for almost 10 years, this is the first time that 10-year plans have been developed for their management. These new management plans are the first to follow the tenets of modern biodiversity conservation and nature conservation principles. And while several other management plans have been elaborated for other protected areas in the country, this is the first set of management plans to be developed in the context of modern Bulgarian protected area and biodiversity conservation legislation.

Experience with public participation in the elaboration of management plans is very limited. Experience with public hearings in relation to environmental legislation is only slightly more developed. There have been earlier efforts to engage the public in the review of the Protected Areas Act, the national park boundaries, and the implementation of EIA procedures. These earlier experiences contribute to a growing ethos about the role and responsibility of government institutions in interpreting policy for the public. Public hearings also illustrate the public right to information that leads to informed participation in decision making and implementation of management policy.

These guidelines reflect a set of lessons learned from previous public hearing events. They illustrate a set of formal activities conducted for the public and interested parties in advance of the public hearing event. They identify a set of responsibilities of the management planning contractor, as well as the National Park Directorates to both (1) inform the public about policy interpretation and national park management expectation for future public relationships, (2) to receive feed-back concerning park management objectives, activities, and functions. These guidelines are aimed at complementing a set of positive partnerships and relationships that have been developed between the new national park directorates and the municipalities that surround them.

Strategy

The law requires a minimum of 20 days between the announcement and event of a public hearing for protected area management plans. In addition, it requires the management planning agency, institution, or contractor to make available copies of the management plan final draft, at locations clearly designated for public access.

These guidelines employ a more strategic set of activities in advance of public hearings. This strategy promotes a more ambitious program of public information on the management plan, as well as more regular access to the institution responsible for eventual management plan implementation. As a consequence, there are four major aspects to this set of public information and participation activities prior to a public hearing event:

1. Orientation and preparation of National Park staff for their direct participation in the public information-sharing specific to the management plans.
2. Development of a set of written materials (management plan synopses) on key management themes.
3. A program of “open doors” – a publicly announced period of public access to personnel, written information and maps each national park. National Park staff, management plan authors, and park experts will facilitate these. Open doors are hosted at all Park Section offices, at the Directorates, and in the nation’s capital;

4. A series of “focal group” information and discussions addressing key park management topics and themes – specifically, natural resource collection from within national parks, and tourism development and management;

Principles

1. This public hearing process is premised on clarity and transparency regarding the management intentions of the National Park Directorate. The principles governing management proposals in the park, rights/access for sustainable use of resources in the park, and the obligations of the Park Directorate for enforcing the policy of the state, will be clearly explained.
2. The public hearings will be conducted in a positive manner, reinforcing the public's right to information. Restrictions on public activities as well as public opportunities will be explained in parallel. Public information will illustrate opportunities for participatory implementation of park management activities. Park's will also identify opportunities for participation of special interest groups in the direct management of protected areas based on shared benefits and shared responsibilities – this ranges from fire suppression and management, to natural resource collection, to tourism development, to natural resource monitoring and research, etc. The clear explanation of these principles is important for building public support for the management plan and future management activities.
3. Public information and access, as well as the conduct of focal group discussions are provided in a manner that provides for feedback and reaction regarding management objectives, norms and regimes. Public scrutiny should help both the contractor and the Park Directorates to gauge both public and stakeholder support for planned, management actions.
4. This process attempts to establish a model for public information, participation and public hearings that can be replicated for other protected area management planning efforts. Therefore, efforts will be aimed at realistic costs, cost efficiency. Results of all phases of the public hearing process will be analyzed in an effort to encourage improvements and future applications. These will be reported.

Proposed Steps in Securing Public Participation and Review

I. Create a general positive attitude and atmosphere.

Public awareness campaigns in advance of a focused set of management planning review activities are important. Towards this end, a public awareness campaign revisited the important general themes of national parks, biodiversity conservation, the international significance of the park natural resources, associated benefits from national parks, etc. This was most recently achieved through both a national and regional campaigns launching the publication – ***“The Green Gold of Bulgaria”*** - the first national, popular publication aimed at these themes. These campaigns lasted two and half months, and were focused on Sofia, and the municipalities surrounding Rila and Central Balkan National Parks. They included extensive national and regional mass media coverage, and a set of specific celebratory events within each Municipality hosting a park section office.

II. *Preparation of Public Information Materials*

Several types of public information materials will be prepared. Some materials are prepared in response to an analysis of management plan topics and themes. These were gathered during management plan preparation.

1. **Park Management Plans** – Sufficient copies will be produced to have one copy available in each park HQ, each park section office, and in NNPS in Sofia. *(10 copies for Rila and Central Balkan National Parks, and 3 copies for NNPS, and 3 copies for BCEG Project)*
2. **Park Management Plan Summaries** – These are management plan synopses. The purpose of this summary is to present exceptional park resources; park significance; park management objectives; the proposed management zones, regimes, and norms; and finally, the specific management intentions. The programs and the projects are presented in summary form, with budget estimates only. The summary of the management plan is presented to municipalities, institutions and organizations that are expected to make official statements regarding the management plan. It is the primary materials for public information and presentation. *(200 pieces will be produced for each Park)*
3. **Question and Answer leaflets** – These are most specifically aimed at the general public, in particular those people living around the national parks. Each leaflet addresses a specific management theme. They are written simply, and aimed at answering most frequently asked questions. These were used to good effect during the public discussion on national park boundaries, conducted in 1999.

We will produce at least two leaflets – one on natural resource collection from within parks, and the other on tourism, tourism development, and tourism management inside and outside the parks. Each leaflet will contain a general introduction to the national park, and will be related to park-specific areas and landmarks.

These leaflets will be prepared by the Contractor's team, and finalized with the Park Directorate. *(300 copies of each leaflet will be developed on each theme. Final content and print run will be decided upon during the meetings for orientation and preparation with the park directorates and with the heads of sections.)*

4. **Maps** - Three (3) sets of 1:50,000/55,000 scale maps will be secured for each Park. One set will be used to illustrate park boundaries, zones, and topography by Park section. The other set will be used to illustrate the entire park for public hearings. They will be laminated for purposes of durability and cleanliness. Each Park Section office will be able to illustrate the general park zone scheme, as well as its relation to the park section.
5. **Posters** – Posters will be designed and printed to notifying the public about public information and participation events. These will be posted in all major population areas surrounding the Park. They will use a common design, and illustrate the schedule of public events, and timetables leading up to public hearings. *(200 pieces will be produced for each park and 50 for Sofia).*
6. **Park Promotional Materials** – these materials will be available in limited quantities at each public event, but will not be produced specifically by the contractor, or by each park. Quantities will be based on existing inventory of these materials at each Park

III. Develop Public Announcement and Mass Media Program

The public announcement and mass media program is developed by the contractor in conjunction with the public information and relations specialists from each park. Together with the contractor, they will coordinate development of a regional and national mass media orientation to the public events, as well as advertise the public hearing. They will also prepare a joint strategy for working with and responding to the mass media during the period of public engagements.

IV. Staff Preparation and Orientation Workshops

One workshop will be conducted for each Park. It will be organized and facilitated by the Contractor and management plan authors. Each workshop will last for 3 days. Specialists from the park directorates, the heads of park sections are participants. The workshop has five aims:

- Orient park staff to the use of management plans, and supporting park management zone maps;
- Orient staff to the set up and conduct of open doors,
- Finalize the content of public information materials;
- Elaborate a plan of action for engaging local town representatives, park management participation in focus group forums, and in Sofia open doors.
- Elaborate the schedule and responsibilities for MOEW staff (national and directorate staff) at the public hearing.

V. Park “Open Doors”

“Open doors” afford public access to Park section personnel and management plan related documentation the location and time of these open doors will be specified in the public announcements using national and regional mass media, as well as posters. Park Section office “doors” will be open for a period of 10 days, during which time a park representative will be present. A guest book will be maintained, and questions can be answered. Member of the public may choose this time to submit written statements that will be read during the public hearing.

Guest books will record the names and institutions of the visitors. Questions that require an answer outside the capacity of the Park section to answer, or need clarification, will be recorded and transferred to the Directorate Headquarters as necessary. These questions and/or opinions do not form part of the official public record. Instead, they are meant to inform Senior Park management about issues and concerns that are raised, and require an information.

In addition, each Park section will conduct an active “meet and greet” program of public information sharing with key Park stakeholder. Each municipality office, village, and other organizations with a vested interest in the future of the Park, will be visited. Each will be presented with a copy of the Park’s Management Plan Summary. As short presentation on the Plan, the public hearing process, and the “open doors”, will be shared. Questions requiring an

interpretation of policy, concessions, or those that affect the regimes, norms and zones of the Plan will be referred to the public hearing, and the Directorate.

Park Directorate Headquarters will also maintain a program of “open doors”. These will be conducted in parallel to the Section Head offices, and last for at least a period of two weeks. Information and staff will be on hand to respond to public demand and interest. In all cases, copies of the full management plan will be accessible for public review. As for Section Offices, the timetable and schedule for “open doors” at headquarters will be advertised.

The management plan authors/contractor will circulate to each park section “open doors”, to allow attendance during at least one session. Specialists will join them to the degree possible from the National Park Directorate.

VI. Sofia Open Doors

“Open Doors” will also be maintained for a one-week period in Sofia. Open doors will be operated and maintained by the management plan contractor. Both Park management plans will be accessible simultaneously. A guest book will be maintained. Information will be provided by the management plan authors. Both National Park Directors and key specialists will attend during specific times during the week. At least one day will be devoted to presentation and discussions on only one park. This will allow for more focused discussion and public scrutiny.

A facility will be selected with a central location and easy public access. All public information materials available to the Park offices will also be available here. Displays will include management zone and administrative zone maps for both parks.

VII. Focus Group Presentations and Discussions

Focus groups will be organized by the Contractor, in collaboration with the Park Directorates. Each focal group session will focus on a pre-determined park management topic. These will be announced in advance, forming part of the public announcement and mass media program.

Focus groups sessions have a dual purpose – clarification on specific issues and management positions, and important feedback on management objectives and approaches

Focus groups are hosted by the National Park, conducted by the contractor, and employ a professional facilitator. Minutes will be kept; but these are not allowed (by law) to form a part of the public record. Rather, focus groups will be used to inform park management teams of important follow-up topics during management plan finalization and implementation.

Each focus group discussion will be held in a key municipality around each Park. Four focus groups discussions are envisioned in advance of the public hearing – two each for Central Balkan National Park, and Rila National Park. Municipal locations are selected based on the proposed role they will have in the preliminary stages of management plan implementation.

VIII Public Hearings

Public hearings will be conducted in the municipality that hosts respectively, the National Park Directorate Headquarters. There will be one public hearing for Central Balkan National Park Management Plan in Gabrovo, and one public hearing for Rila National Park Management Plan, in Blagoevgrad.

The role of the National Park Directorate. The National Park Directorate is the **host** of the public hearing. The Director will open the hearing, and introduce the Contractor's team and the reasons for the holding of the public hearing. During the hearing, representatives of the Directorate will answer questions related plan implementation (annual action plans), the management plan implementation procedures and the possibilities for participation in the park management activities.

All questions related to the Park's regimes, norms or specific regulatory activities, or to the administration of the park, will also be answered by the Director of the Park.

The role of the Ministry of Environment and Waters. The MOEW/NNPS will have both a supervisory role, as well as an observation role in the public hearing. They will:

- Explain the procedure that will be observed during the public hearing;
- Observe the proceedings and ensure that they abide by the spirit and intention of the law;
- Answer matters requiring clarification and elaboration regarding relevant laws and/or regulations;

The Contractor's role – Overall organization of the event will be undertaken by the Contractor's team. The contractor will ensure the necessary arrangement are made for a public hall, associated amenities, and the necessary recording equipment/services required for the public record. The management plan will be presented at the meeting by the Contractor and Management Plan's primary author, as required in the Regulation. The Management Plan authors will answers questions raised by the presentation, and by the public. The representatives of the team will answer questions aimed at clarification of management plan contents.

A professional moderator will ensure that the rules of conduct at the public hearing are clearly understood, and that they are observed throughout the period of the public hearing.

The Contractor's team will provide minutes (a protocol) of the event. They are required by law to:

- Make amendments to the management plan, as appropriate;
- Respond in writing within one month of the public hearing, to proposals that are rejected, with supporting rationale;

Within one month of the public hearing, the Contractor will submit to the Ministry of Environment and Waters, a final draft management plan that accommodates the results of the public hearing. In addition, the Contractor will also supply a list of proposals to the Plan that were rejected, with brief explanations.

All matters, recommendations and concerns that are accepted by the Contractor and Park Directorate will be reflected in the original final draft text of each Management Plan.